

ANGLER GUIDE

"In every catch-and-release fisherman's past there is an old black frying pan...." -- John Gierach, *The View From Rat Lake*

Gasconade River game fish species that are commonly fished by the pole-and-line method include smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, rock bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish and crappie species. Panfish species such as longear sunfish and bluegill sunfish are less commonly fished but are a good addition to the creel. Other species of fish such as the sucker and redhorse are taken by gigging or other methods and are excellent fish species for the fish fry. The paddlefish is also sought in reaches of the main stem Gasconade River.

In streams the statewide black bass regulation is a daily limit of six, in aggregate including smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, spotted bass, and all black bass hybrids; bass may not be taken from March 1 to the fourth Saturday in May. The stream statewide minimum size limit is 12 inches.

Largemouth bass are the dominant black bass species due to the many large pools found in the Maries County portion of the river. Largemouth bass have preference for pools greater than 3' in depth. During spring, largemouth can be found in the backwater off-channel areas, but summer temperatures (prefer water temperatures of 82-87°F) force largemouth into the main channel habitats where the water quality is better. The larger bass defend a territory that gives them the best access to cover and food that may consist of insects, crayfish, frogs, or fish. Sampling by fisheries biologists shows that largemouth are the largest bass species within any pool. Spotted bass look similar to largemouth bass in appearance except for their lower maximum total length and tooth patch on the tongue. Spotted bass can also be caught with some regularity in the Gasconade River by fishing the rootwads and snags associated with current along cut banks.

Largemouth Bass Fishing Tips

Look for largemouth bass near prominent structure. The river's weedy backwater pools may be a good choice to fish during spring but during the summer try the main channel where newly fallen trees or large rocky areas are found. Where to fish on the main channel during summer months can be a tricky decision. Fishing areas with the appropriate combination of current to bring food and to provide cover, and shade for thermal refuge, a vigilant angler can be successful. Largemouth bass can be found in slower flowing water than smallmouth bass. Anglers throw a vast array of artificial lures at largemouth bass, from plastic worms and jigs to topwater lures and spinnerbaits. Plastic worms fished Texas style work well for largemouth bass and spotted bass.

Smallmouth bass habitat is slightly different from the largemouth bass. Smallmouth prefer slightly cooler water (approximately 78 degrees F) with woody structure or boulders. A small pocket hole along an undercut bank, just outside of swiftly-moving water, may be good cover for a smallmouth bass waiting in ambush for a foraging crayfish, aquatic insect, or small fish.

Smallmouth Bass Fishing Tips

The great fighting ability of smallmouth bass has attracted recreational anglers for years. In the main stem Gasconade River smallmouth bass can be found in cover associated with current at the top ends of bluff holes. In the Gasconade River tributaries look for smallmouth bass where rootwads and boulders or

sturdy current-breaking structure and current meet. In the Osage Creek, smallmouth up to 16.5 inches are sampled and Master-Angler-size fish (17 inches) are reported annually. Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) created a regulation in March 2000 that protects smallmouth bass in the Osage Fork of the Gasconade River, from Skyline Drive bridge near Orla to its confluence with the Gasconade River, by an 18-inch minimum length limit. Only one of the six black bass may be a smallmouth bass. Artificial lures, such as small, floating crayfish colored crankbaits and plastic worms fished around cover, are successful. Live bait (crayfish, worms, minnows) also work well.

Rock bass (goggle-eye) have no size limit and have a daily limit of fifteen. Rock bass make a great addition to the creel and frying pan. Found in similar habitat as the smallmouth, these smaller members of the sunfish family prefer rocky bottoms and streams with sluggish or moderate currents. In tributaries to the Gasconade River, rock bass seek cover near water willow, rootwads, or boulders near the shoreline. An angler can expect 7"-9" rock bass and a few one-pound rock bass. MDC created a regulation in March 2001 that protects rock bass in the Osage Fork of the Gasconade River, from Skyline Drive bridge near Orla to its confluence with the Gasconade River, with a minimum length limit of eight inches, and a daily limit of eight rock bass.

Rock Bass Fishing Tips

Rock bass have the habit of streaking out of nowhere to attack virtually any bait or lure.

This spunky fighting fish takes lures or natural baits. Artificial lures may include tiny jigs, in-line spinner, small spoons, or small spinner baits. Worms, grubs, leeches, small minnows, crickets, grasshoppers are effective natural baits.

Channel catfish are bottom feeders. They are found in water that ranges from 82-87 degrees F. Feeding behavior is poor outside of the optimal temperature range, so you should plan your fishing on hot days in deeper water or in the cool morning or late evening hours. Look for them in habitat containing current, deep pools, and cover such as downed trees.

Catfish Fishing Tips

Your bait should be on or near bottom to attract attention. Although fish will take live bait such as minnows, frogs, © Joe Tomelleriearthworms, or sunfish, they are attracted to anything with strong scent such as rotting meat or bloody chicken or beef livers. There are a number of effective prepared baits on the market. Fishing trotlines, limb lines, and bank lines at night are the most popular methods of angling for channel catfish. Unlike the channel catfish, flathead catfish prefer live bait or freshly killed baits. Use large minnows, goldfish, green sunfish, or bullheads. In the river, catfish can be taken throughout the year. Daily limit is ten (10) channel catfish and five (5) flathead catfish. There is no length limit on catfish species taken from the Gasconade River.

Meaty river redhorse, golden redhorse, and hog sucker are taken by grabbing, (or snagging), pole-and-line angling using bait, or by gigging. Gigging has long been a local tradition in the Ozarks. Nongame fish may be taken by the gig method in the Gasconade River between sunrise and midnight from September 15 to January 31 with a daily limit of 20 fish in aggregate (See Summary of Missouri Fishing Regulations).

Sucker Fishing Tips

Sucker species are more often taken by gigging and snagging, but less dependent on clear water, pole-and-line methods have been successful using earthworm or mussels (clams) as bait. After scaling, filleting, and scoring (cut-vertically through the flesh every 1/4 inch but not through the skin), deep-frying scored fillets rolled in cornmeal is probably the most common way to fix suckers.

Other species of fish sought after are longear sunfish, bluegill sunfish and the paddlefish. Enjoy fishing for longear sunfish, bluegill sunfish using earthworms or larva mimics on jigs. Bluegill can be found in a variety of water temperatures but will avoid temperatures greater than 86 EF. Feeding behavior declines outside of the optimal temperature range, so plan your fishing on hot days in the shaded areas or in the cooler morning hours. Found in good abundance, these species co-exist in association with basses and other sunfish species. Longear can be taken throughout the year using the same fishing methods as bluegill sunfish. The paddlefish is one of Missouri's unique fisheries and when water conditions are right, paddlefish can be caught at the mouth of the Gasconade River. This plankton feeder is popular with anglers during the March 15 to April 30 season. Limit is two paddlefish daily and legal fish must be 24 inches from eye to fork of tail. Snagging with large treble hooks is the only practical method to take paddlefish. Because this fish has the potential to top 100 pounds, anglers are generally outfitted with heavy duty rods and reels. Check Missouri Fishing Regulations for details.

Thermal Preferences of major game fish.

Species	Optimum EF	Lethal EF
channel catfish	82.5-87	98
bluegill sunfish	84-86	98.5
largemouth bass	79-82.5	97.5
smallmouth bass	79	95

Links for Angling

<http://www.bassmaster.com/>

Fishing Prospects

State Fishing Regulations

[The Complete Angler](#)

The Smallmouth Bass Alliance

Missouri Fishing Links

Tips and techniques